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"THROUGH THE EYE OF A NEEDLE"

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BY

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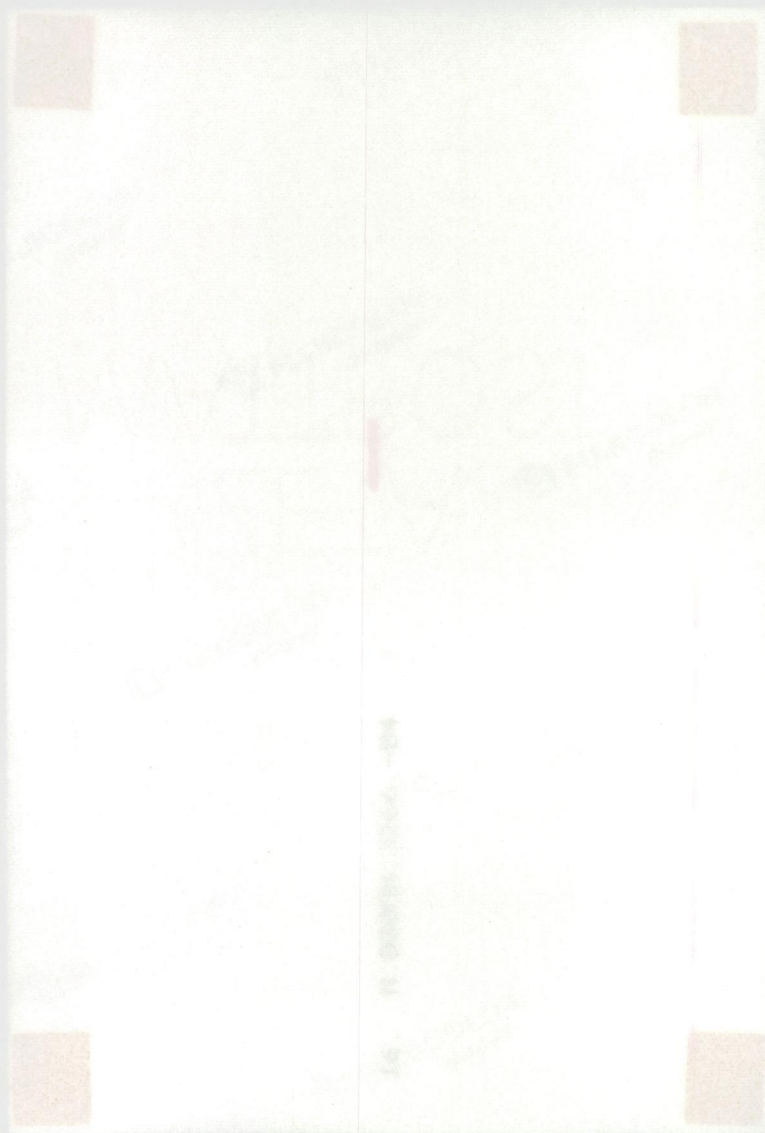
INTRODUCTION

The chosen source for both my own personal project and that which I used in the classroom has been the environment in and around Saint Stephen's Green. The Green was a natural choice due to its proximity to my own location in Leinster Lane and the fact that the school for my teaching practice this year is the Loreto College, 58, Saint Stephen's Green. Parallel to my own work, the first year pupils from the Loreto explored the Green in a visual manner spending several days drawing in the park. The idea was to make them more aware of an environment they encountered everyday on their way to school through the medium of visual language. What is experienced in the art room has a lot to do with the world outside the school and vice-versa.

By my own experiences, and observations making my own research in the Green, I was able to serve as a catalyst for the pupils. I could communicate my own discoveries and interests to the pupils leading them to make discoveries of their own. The school project was an extension of my own research for ideas.

Artists of all kinds have used their immediate surroundings as source material for their work from Vermeer's studies of Dutch interiors to the hieroglyphics on Egyptian tombs.

What I have sought to achieve is a visual record of the Park and architecture of Saint Stephen's Green through





1 LORETO COLLEGE, ST STEPHEN'S GREEN

the medium of embroidery. In my own work I have dealt with a format and techniques that have always appealed to me and which I felt would be the most interesting areas to concentrate and develop in my final year in college. As I was so immersed in this project, I felt it was reflected in my teaching. Confidence in my own work gave me the confidence and knowledge to fully immerse the pupils in the project at hand.



MY PERSONAL PROJECT

"In this sense the work reflects its maker and the maker in turn assumes responsibility for and an identification with the work".

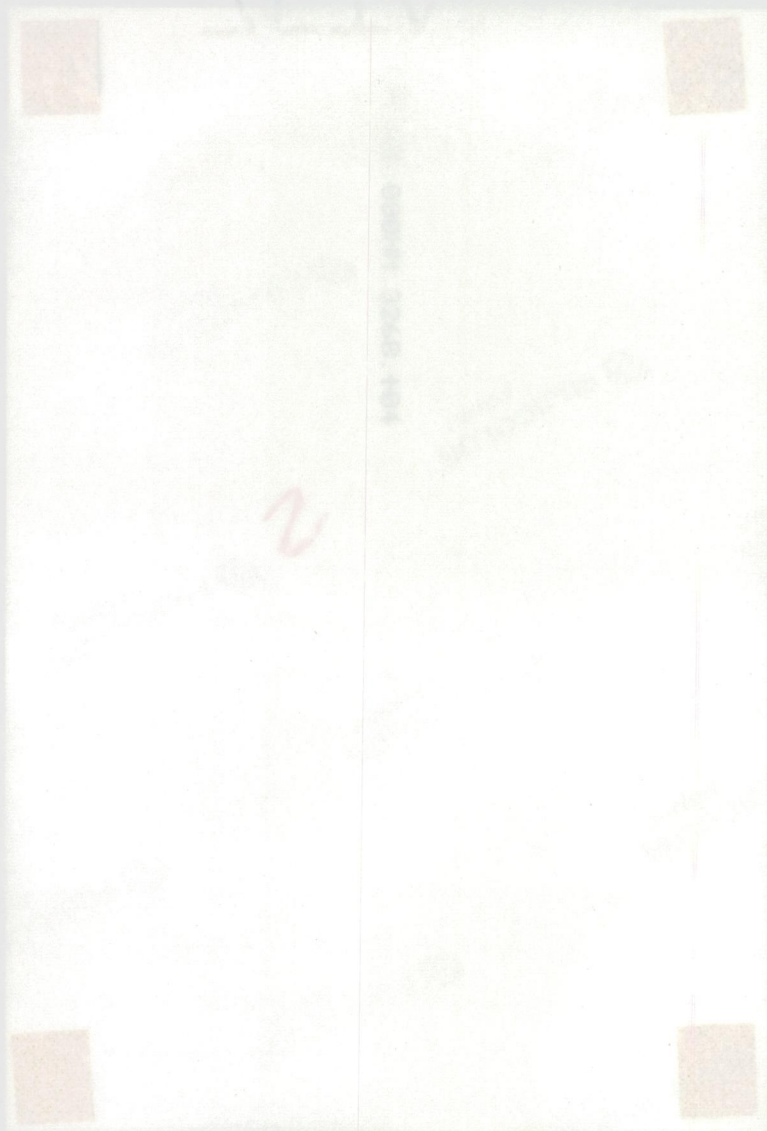
(Eisner) (6)

The main source for my final years work had been the environment in and around Saint Stephen's Green. My major study is embroidery and the project and the project at hand was to use the 'Green' as the visual stimulus for a finished piece. The area in question offered a wide scope for research in both man-made and natural environments. I had no preconcieced notions of what my final piece of embroidery would be. I did know, never the less, that there were several elements in which I was interested. They were working through the medium of line and paying attention to fine detail. These are technical skills and could be related to other environments. As to what I would ultimately concentrate on as a definitive source, I had little idea of on my first day sketching in the 'Green'.

The Irish weather was relatively kind to me, a little cold perhaps, but not too much rainfall! The preparatory work for my embroidery was based on sketchbook work. My sketchbooks were used for collecting, organising, analysing and utilising visual information. They were a working tool and hence the outer covers grew tattier as the productivity and trips to Saint Stephen's Green increased. The sketchbooks contain the preparatory visual studies for my embroidery. This information was especially important for me as I needed a through visual study of the environment in order to represent it through a textile craft.

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WALTBOST

ATES



1.22 ANDO HIROSHIGE, *Maple Leaves at the Tekona Shrine, Mamma*, 1857. Polychrome woodblock print, 13¼ × 9½ ins (35 × 24cm). The British Museum, London.

2 MAPLE LEAVES AT THE TELONA SHRINE by

Ando Hiroshige

One important aspect of drawing is using it as a method for enquiry and exploration. Drawing is a means of gathering and recording visual information. It is a personal study of the subject at hand. The enquiry I made in my sketchbooks was both objective and subjective. Objective from the point of view that I tried to represent the trees and buildings as accurately and precisely as I could. The work was subjective in the sense that I made personal judgements in the organisation of my drawings to form the basis of a panel format for embroidery. Both aspects worked together. I did not concern myself initially with the end product or finalised design. Rather I concentrated on drawing all aspects of the environment around Saint Stephen's Green - ranging from the ducks to architectural details.

Japanese art has always appealed to me. The manner in which Japanese artists use flattened shapes building them up one on top of another to give the impression of space, is an alternative approach to European perspective. I began to look at the trees and hedges around the Green with the buildings behind them and wondered how could I achieve a similar effect. The idea of concentrating on a frontal view of a group of trees with details of the architecture peeping through the leaves seemed to emanate the Japanese idea of space. I began to look at different areas around the outer perimeter path of the 'Green', looking at the size and variety of the foliage and how the architecture could be seen behind them. New ideas



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3 VIEW FROM PERIMETER WALK

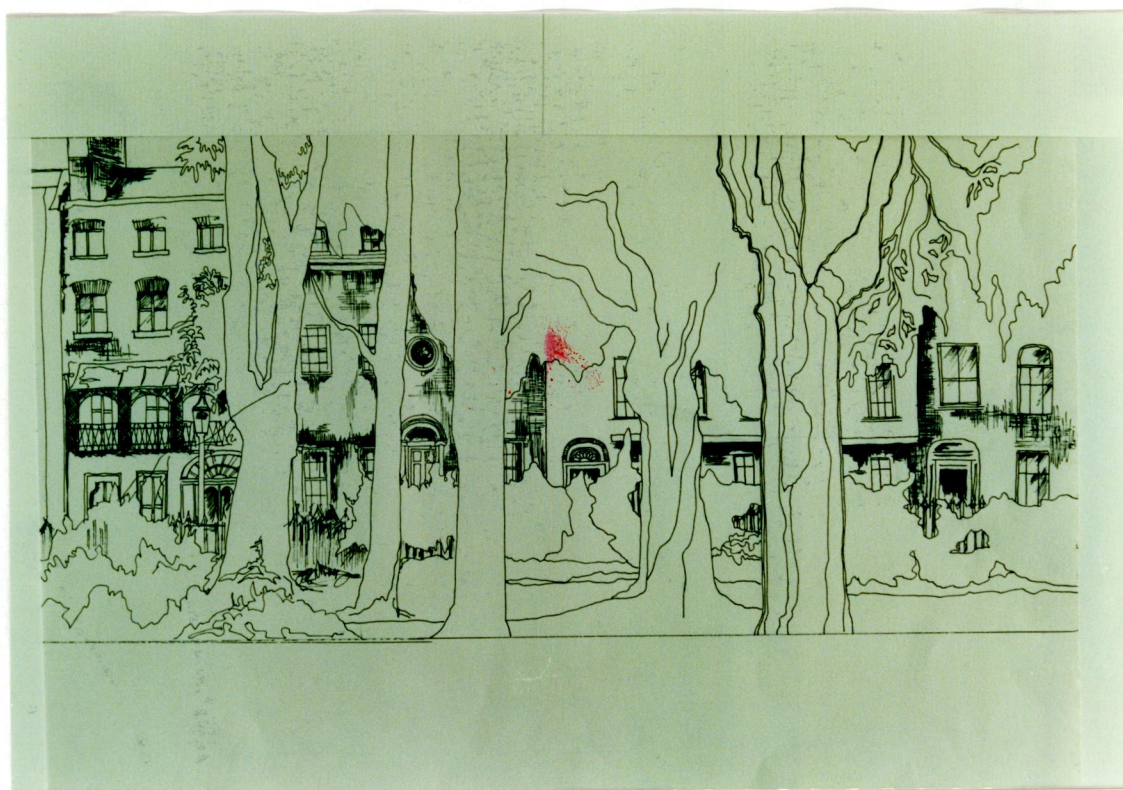
arose as I worked - why see each side of the Green as a separate entity? Why not amalgamate them? Did I need to use all the areas I had sketched? The idea of using the sections which most appealed to me in one long panel came from this work.

I still was a little unsure of the next step. In recording the various sections of the 'Green', I had worked through the medium of line. Of all the techniques of drawing, line is the one I always had most confidence in using. However a black and white line drawing of the architecture and foliage around Saint Stephen's Green is not the only research I needed before I launched myself into a design for an embroidered panel. The line work did prove very useful for recording details and precise information about the environment at hand.

I know I had finally hit on the format I wished to pursue - a long panel using architecture and foliage. What I needed to do now was to throw some colour on the situation! I looked at the actual colours before me - should I represent them exactly or would the grey buildings seem a little mundane? I thought of highlighting some of the colours but which ones? I discussed the problem with my tutor, Merrie O'Sullivan, and together we decided it would be more satisfying to heighten the colour content. From this, the idea to use the effect of the sun as it moved across the green during the day developed. Sunshine changed and heightened the





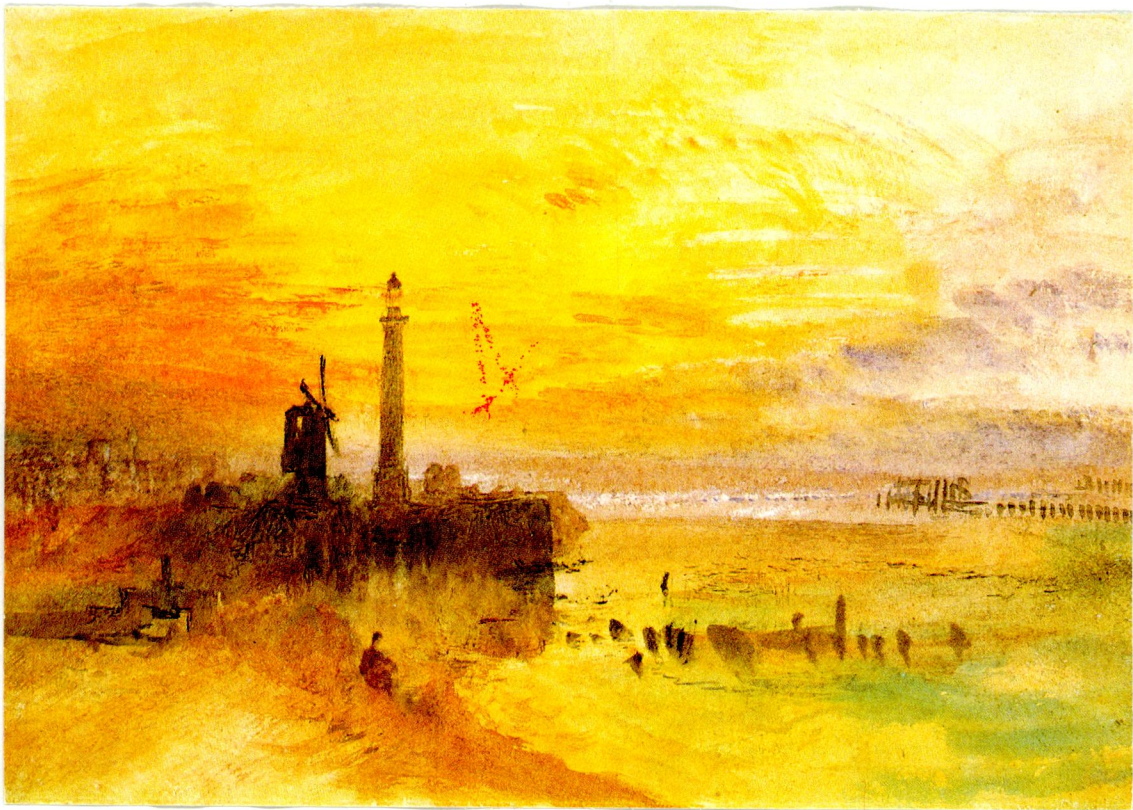


4 LINE DRAWING OF ARCHITECTURE AND FOLIAGE

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5 YARMOUTH HARBOUR, NORFOLK by

J.M.W. Turner

colours of the brick work and shrubbery alike. The movement of the sun across the sky could easily be linked to a change of colour along the length of the panel.

So it was back to the drawing board! I photocopied my line drawings in order to preserve the initial work I experimented with a range of colour ideas on the photocopies, searching for a solution which give the most successful balance of tone and harmony and still retained a lively colour content. I looked at Turner watercolours as a colour reference. Turner, rather than relying on perspective, conveyed the impression of distance by increasing saturation of colours as the eye moves further into the distance. (13) I reserversed this process by darkening the foreground to give the impression of shadow on the trees and also to give the impression that the buildings were lit by sunlight. When I reached the colour study that I was happiest with, I woiked up areas of texture on the foreground with coloured crayons to further emphasize areas coming forward on the picture plane. The design was now ready to be transfered to fabric and thread.

My first concern was the background fabric. I wanted to keep a delicate finish to the completed piece. Therefore, the background was crucial. If I started with some thing too 'heavy', eg a fabric such astured which is very dense, the delicacy would be lost immediately. I experimented with several translucent fabrics - chiffon,

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6a COLOUR STUDY

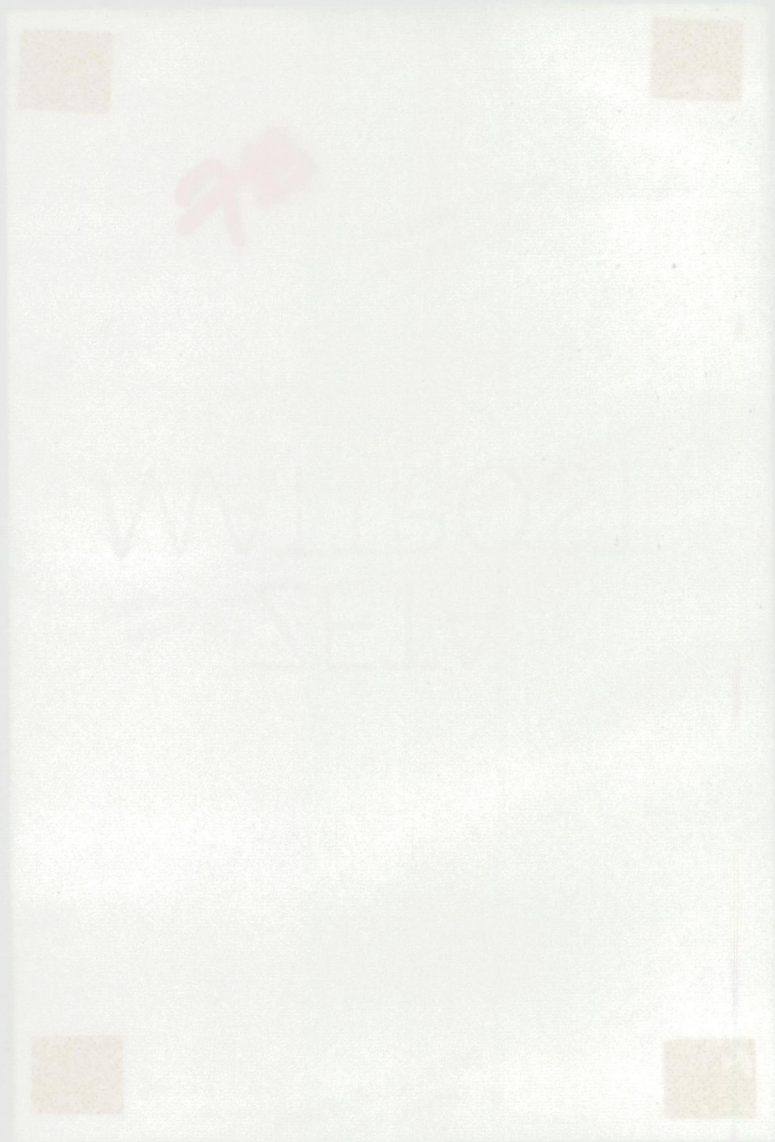


6b FINAL DESIGN

georgette and organza. As these fabrics are available in mainly whites and creams and I was looking for something with a greater colour content, I decided to dye the fabrics myself. I have dyed thread and wools previously for embroidery and found the process extremely rewarding. I feel it gives a much more personal input into the work. A hands on experience serves to reinforce the task at hand and through personal experience knowledge acquired is retained more readily. This relates very much to the work of the pupils. They made their own sketches, chose their own thread and fabrics and executed their own embroideries in a paralld manner to my own work.

The dued fabric which I used was made by laying georgette 9a light translucent fabric<sup>0</sup> out on a table covered in newsprint. The fabric was soaked with water to make it ready to accept the dye. I sponged the desired colours over the fabric and left it to soak. The newsprint took up the excess dye. While this was in progress I also dyed lenghts of white cotton thread to the colours I had used in my design. This was very experimental, interchanging the skins from different dye-baths to achieve a wide variety of colours. "Colour and dyeing facts can be discovered through trial and error. Exact colours are often unpredictable and there is excitement in that uncertainty." (9) There is excitement indeed, but also frustration when what you thought would be a delicate lilac thread turns out to be a muddy brown mess. However, I perserved and obtained the results I wanted.







7a DYED THREADS



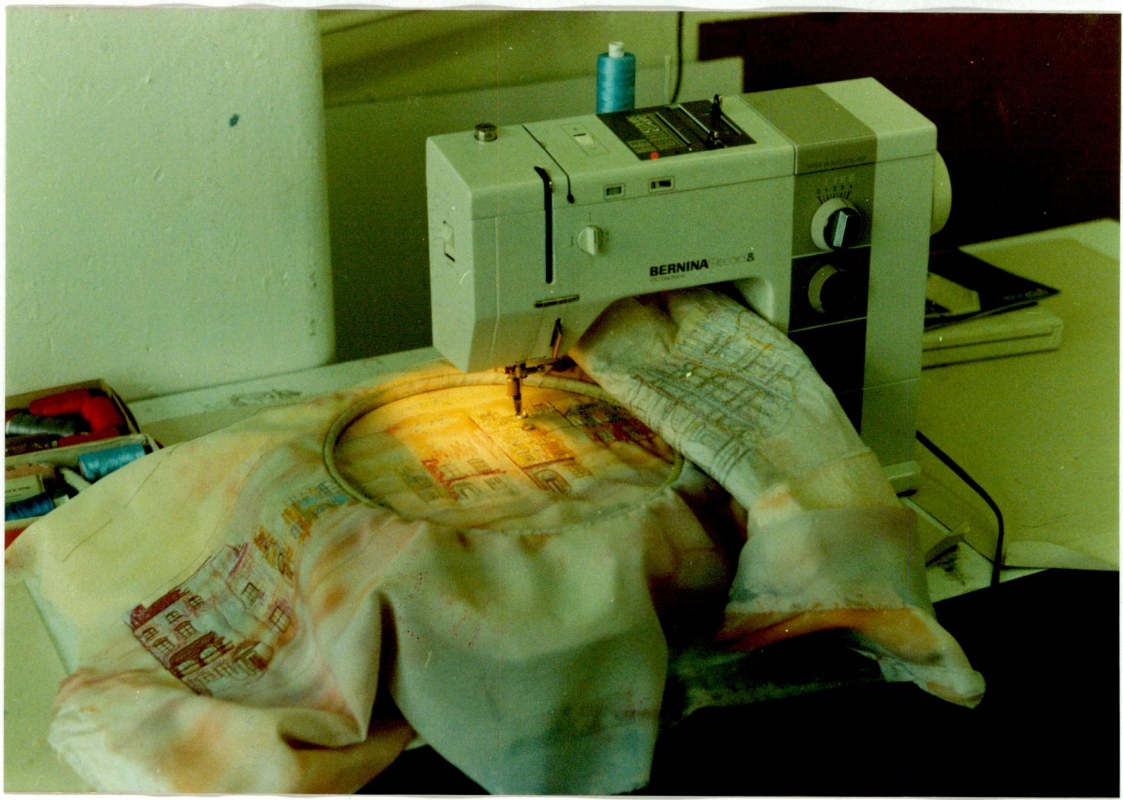
7b EQUIPMENT FOR BATIK

In my third year visual arts for the classroom (V.A.C.) textiles block, I was introduced to the techniques of batik (wax resist) dying. I really enjoyed this work and was always anxious to use it in conjunction with embroidery. Rather than searching for ready dyed fabrics for my work, I decided to use the batik technique to dye my own. I felt the effects which could be achieved through batik would be very sympathetic to the manner in which I had studied the trees and shrubbery in my drawings. The idea to use batik came from studying the drawings and the final design and I was delighted to use the technique again.

Using dylon cold water dyes. I prepared a range of fabric samples using the batik technique, trying to create qualities which related to both the colours and shapes of my drawing. These batik pieces were then cut to size for the areas required by making paper patterns from more photocopies!

The complete design was traced onto the georgette, which had now been strengthened by a backing cloth. The technique I used to depict the architecture was machine embroidery. I wanted to preserve the fine quality and attention to detail that I had made in my drawings and machine embroidery is sympathetic to these qualities. In keeping with the idea of a finely worked delicate panel, I used mainly fine shimmering threads especially for the





8a WORK IN PROGRESS



architecture to enhance this. Machine embroidery is very definitely drawing with a needle. Once practiced it is a skill open to much development. In my panel, I have used it to accentuate my perception of the architectural details around the gree and to build up the foreground surface. I have looked at the work of the embroiderer Jan Beaney and seen how she has used the machine to similar effect. I have always admired her work and she has served as a stimulus for my own personal choices and development. Once the buildings were completed, the batiked trees and shrubbery were sewn in place. The final step was to work up the foreground to truly give the impression of a build-up of layers to create an illusion of depth (in the same manner as the Japanese!)

I would see other drawing research I made in the Green as complimentary to my main panel and which could also be worked through. The other aspect of my drawing research which I would be interested in continuing are my studies of the ducks from the lake. They were very much an accidental discovery but once found, I became very involved with them. I loved watching them on the lake, making quick sketches of their movements, trying to capture their individual characters.

I have found the work I did this year highly rewarding. It has given me renewed confidence in my own ability - both to draw and to transfer my ideas to thread and fabric. I discovered, that even as an art student, I was





9 SKETCHES OF 'THE DUCKS'



guilty of looking without seeing I have passed through the Green so many times during my years in college without truly realising the wealth of usual stimuli around me. By looking more closely we learn that the environment can offer a wide variety of stimuli for all aspects of artistic creation whether they be purely drawing or a creative embroidery!

A BRIEF HISTORY OF  
SAINT STEPHEN'S GREEN

Parks and gardens can be seen as mans attempt to formalise nature according to the philosophies of the time. Parks and gardens are part of the contemporary society that made them, they cannot be isolated, for they can give us insight into the society that planned them. Saint Stephen's Green is no exception. When it was first laid out in 1660, it served a purpose for its time. Later when it was developed to the park we know so well, it again reflected the needs and fashions of the time.

We can trace civilisations first gardens back to prehistoric times when man began to keep domestic animals and built an enclosure to keep them. Once the primary needs of food and shelter were satisfied, man turns to his aesthetic needs - leading to the development of organised garden planning. Early gardens were purely functional but as time moved on they became more and more ornamental. Practical consideration such as fencing to keep away farm fowl developed into ornamental stone pillars and a well for water became a carved fountain.

The discoveries of the Renaissance were to lay the foundations for garden planning and forms the basis of most parks including Saint Stephen's Green. The Renaissance man dabbled in the philosophies of ancient Greece and Rome and related the perfect order of their philosophy to all aspects of society - gardens included.

The formalised planning for these sophisticated gardens

was an extension also of the great commercial wealth enjoyed by the Italian merchants and their desire to display their new found wealth with large villas surrounded by luxurious gardens. So the foundations were laid for the concepts of a garden for its own sake.

In 17th century France and 18th century England garden planning was considered an art form in itself. The idea of capturing nature and putting it to perfect use was the ideal garden or park. Painters, architects, sculptors, poets and philosophers all contributed to this theory.

All of these factors naturally influenced A. C. Cousins, the engineer responsible for the 'Green' as we know it today.

The formal layout of the central flowerbeds with the symmetrical fountains is an extension of garden planning seen in Versailles. The structure of Saint Stephen's Green cannot be seen, therefore, in isolation. It, too, has its influences from the past which have developed alongside the growth and change of the nation's capital.

So far, I have looked at the general historical aspects which have moulded the 'Green'. However like many long-standing landmarks it has a chequered history of its own.

St Stephen's Green is a landmark in Dublin city, which for many, is a haven from the noise and bustle of the

nations capital. One has only to set foot inside it during any sunny summer lunch-time, to see how people flock to this garden in the city. But of all the people who frequent the 'Green', wheter to use it as a short cut from Grafton St to Earlsfort Terrace, or as a place of calm amid the city pressures, how many know of it's history and evelution?

Dublin city assembly decided to develop Saint Stephen's Green in 1663, to provided an income for the city and to serve as an open space for the people. In 1664, 27 central acres were marked out for preservation. The remaining 33 acres were divided into ninety building lots, the rent for each to

"Be disposed for walking in the whole Green and for paving the roads of streets." (4)

The City Assembly leveled the interior and built a stone wall around it. There was a gravel walk, further in a drainage ditch, with another walk lined with hedges. This was the physical layout of the Green for 150 years.

During the 18th century, the interior was used for grazing cattle and horses and for a place for public gatherings. The walk along the northside was a fashionable place to walk. However the early drainage system did not surfice and the Green was swampy in winter.

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10 IRON RAILINGS C 1800

Unfortunately by the end of the 18th century the stone wall surrounding the Green had collapsed, the drainage ditch was stagnant and the trees and shrubery in decay.

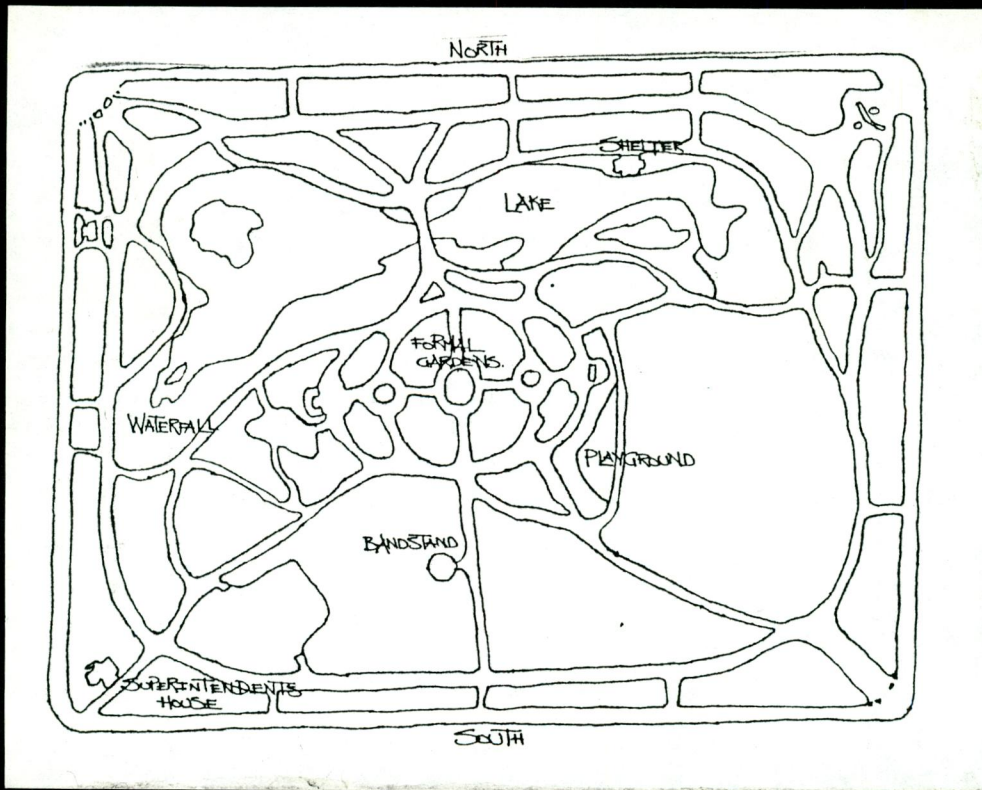
But the situation was reversed by an 1814 Act of Parliament, which placed the maintenance of the Green in the hands of the Commissioners representing the local householders. The responsible for laying many of the foundations of the 'Green' we know today. They put in new drains, filled the stagnant drainage ditch, planted new trees, and replaced the old perimeter paths with new interior walks. The stone wall was knocked and replaced with cast-iron railings. A wide path was laid outside the railings to separate the Park from the road. The granite billiards along the road side and the iron railings survive to this day.

In order to preserve the newly improved 'Green', the Commissioners' decided to make it a private park, accessible only to those who rented keys to its gates. It became a status symbol in Dublin society to hold a key, but the move was resented by the general public. Their protests fell on deaf ears, however!

It was not until Sir Arthur Guinness took an interest in the 'Green' that the position was to change. Sir Arthur said,



MAP OF ST STEPHEN' GREEN



"I remember\_\_\_ walking in Saint Stephen's Green with a relative, long since dead. I told her of my determination that should it ever be in my power I would do my best to eddict the opening of that enclosure to the public. (4)

Using his political influence, in 1877, he secured an Act of Parliment which entrusted the maintenance of the Green into the hands of the Commissioners for Public Works, (of which Sir Arthur was a member!). He launched himself wholeheartedly into a new design and layout for the Green. A room was rented in the Shelbourne Hotel where a scale model was built as a reference source for the engineer, A. C. Cousins and William Shepard, the foreman in charge. The Green took on further new features which are very much part of the park we know today. During this period the artifical lake was built along with stone waterfall the formal flower beds and fountains in the centre, and the superintendants lodge designed by F. J. Fuller (Swiss shelters were also built, but they no longer survive).

"The public streamed into it and enjoyed to their hearts content, the rural charm with which it has been invested \_\_\_\_\_. The picture is a truly delighted one and cannot fail to impress every visitor to the Green with the incalculable benefits which such an oasis must bestow on the city and its people." (4)

A quote from the Daily Express newspaper recording the events of the opening of the newly rennovated Saint Stephen's Green on July

27th 1880.

Since that date the 'Green' has enjoyed a peaceful existence in the heart of the city. The turmoil of the Easter Rising in 1916 was the only event to disturb its existence. The fresh Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers led by Michael Mullin and Countess Mankiewicz occupied the 'Green' on Easter Monday. Fighting continued there throughout the week. The Park Superintendant recorded the historical events but also noted the physical damage to the Park!

"I am sorry to say six of our water fowl were shot, seven garden seats were broken and about 300 shrubs were destroyed." (4)

and he himself

"... fed the birds ... daily under considerable risk of being shot." (4)

Today, thankfully, one does not have to endure such risks! We can thank Arthur Guinness for more than a pint of stout, Saint Stephen's Green has given and still continues to give countless visitors much pleasure and enjoyment. It truly is the garden in the city!

THE HISTORICAL ASPECT

"...It is an ingenious Art, requires a nice taste in Drawing, a bold fancy to invent new Patterns, and a clean Hand to save their work form tarnishing....."

(Campbell) (14)

"It (Art) also takes these visions most characteristic of man, his fears, his dreams, his recollections, and provides these too with visual metaphors."

(Eisner) (6)

A study into the history of embroidery shows how this particular art form has reflected societies changes throughour history. It has served as a metaphor for story - telling, the glory of the Church, personel wealth and social status. Embroidery has been effected and influenced, like all the other arts, by social change, historical events, economic necessity and pratical and technical considerations. This can be illustrated by the pratical patchwork quilts of New England made at home by the women of the house from scraps of cloth to provide much needed warmth during the long, cold winter. The highly decorative bed quilts of 17th century served also as protection from the cold, but they showed the obvious wealth of their owners. The ecclesisstical work of the Anglo-Saxon perial served to glorify the Christian Church and Jacobean stumpwork told the story of the fall of the Englist crown.

The European embroideriers of the 9th to the 15th centuries, which survive today are mainly ecclesiastical. Our knowledge of secular work depends more on documentation rather than actual pieces of work. Evidence suggests that embroidery was held in high esteem among the craft guilds and was used to decorate the homes

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2.138 THE LIMBOURG BROTHERS, October, from *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, 1413–16. Illumination, 8½ × 5½ ins (21.6 × 14cm). Musée Condé, Chantilly, France.

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"OCTOBER from LES TRES RICHES

Heures du Duc de Berry by the Limbourg Brothers

and clothing of the rich. The ecclesiastical work featured stories from the bible. The designs for religious garments ran in tandem to design used in stone-carving, metalwork and manuscripts. English embroideries of this period use the style of the Romanesque and Gothic churches. The same detailed and decorative style is to be found in such manuscripts as the Book of Kells. The involved patterns and stylised ornament of this period has always appealed to me. The manner in which the scribe carefully worked intricate, overlapping shapes and coloured them with such precision is a fascination to me. My main concern in all works of art, whatever the medium, is attention to fine detail. The Book of Hours and the work of the Limbourg brothers also reflects this interest in medieval art. In the copper plate engravings of the 15th century artist, Albrecht Durer, the variety of tones, textures and subtle gradations which can be used through the medium of line are displayed. The striking quality of Durer's paintings and engravings are his attention to minute detail

"The tiniest detail should be done skilfully and as well as possible, nor should the slightest wrinkles and puckers be omitted."

(Albrecht Durer) (7)

My love of fine detail crosses into the field of embroidery. Between 1580 and 1630 English embroidery reached the height of lavish and pure decoration. It was



most evident in the field of costume. A visitor to London at the time "observed the men's fuffs, embroidered shirts and doublets" "slashed jagged, cut, carve, pinched and laced."

At the same time, embroiderer's were turning to nature for inspiration for their large scale wall and bed hangings. Narrative and biblical stories were told along the length of these hangings. Biblical figures were dressed in contemporary attire, set in classical Renaissance gardens, villas and temples. Pattern books of Renaissance architecture were sought by the skilled craftsmen, to serve as a guideline to faithfully reproduce the new ideas coming from Italy at the time. These works were sought by the nobility and the new merchant class alike and became a symbol of wealth and prosperity. In my own wall-hanging for my degree presentation, I did not use any figurative studies. However I have faithfully reproduces the architecture of Saint Stephen's Green, in much the same manner as the Elizabethan embroiderer's. The story which tell is more concerned with the movement of daylight across the 'Green', how in one day sunlight touches the architecture and foliage, casting a different light upon it. A little more abstract than a biblical story, but the same narrative concept is used.

But not all embroiderer's were so concerned with changing





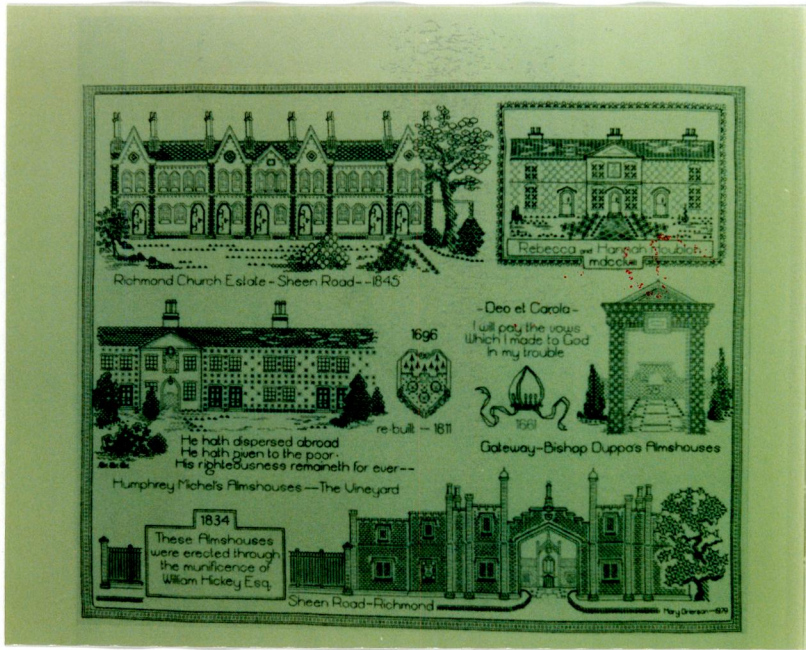
13 DETAIL FROM BRADFORD TABLE CARPET

trends and continental influences. Rural scenes were depicted on works such as the Bradford table carpet (now found in the Victoria and Albert Museum.) "It is worked in coloured silks on linen canvas using tent stitch with about 60 stitches to 1 square centimetre. The central field is a trellis enclosing bunches of grapes, and the borders are continuous landscapes containing buildings, animals, and figures, many of them engaged in day to day occupations. (14) It shows churches, farmhouses, shepherds at work, all typical of the period. Some members of the nobility took an active part in the design and execution of wall-hangings for their mansions. The catalogue of belongings for Hardwick Hall, home to the Countess of Shrewsbury, lists numerous hangings depicting not only scenes from mythology but also; "an other long quition (cushion) of needlework of the platt (plain) of Chatesworth house with grene, red and yellow silke frence buttons of carnation silke and silver and lyned with white, grene, and yellowe cloth of silver." (11)

Another aspect of embroidery history I have looked at is the "sampler." The execution of embroidery 'Samples' has been in evidence from the time of the first recorded embroidery work. The word comes from the Latin 'exemplum' meaning: "an example to be followed, a model." (14) They were originally a record of patterns and stitched for amateur needlewomen, but gradually developed into a method of recording personal facts and motifs eg using a set stitch, a pictorial account of an historical



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14 TUDOR CHIMMNEYS by Mary Grierson

chronicles of their time, depicting major events in society, both domestic and historical. The works I have been concerned with are those which represent architectural settings. The depiction of houses, churches, and other buildings is common place in the history of the Sampler. They suggest to me the closeness between the embroiderer and their immediate surroundings. The fine details show how carefully the buildings were observed in much the same way as I have tried to represent accurately the architecture around St Stephen's Green in my panel. The work of a contemporary embroiderer, Mary Grierson, is a reflection of this technique. Her Sampler "Tudor Chimneys" conveys the intricate patterns of the brickwork and the geometrical organisation of the windows on the almshouses.

The idea that an embroiderer ought to create his/her own designs is a comparatively modern concept. It came partly as a result of the writings of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Society of the late 1800's. Morris turned against the 'slavish imitation' of painting which was so admired at the time. Morris borrowed from the medieval tradition in an attempt to get back to first principles. (14) in a search for simplicity of design and traditional use of material. In the 1880's, in the Glasgow School of Art, the idea spread and is now thought as common practice in art schools where students are selected for their ability to draw.

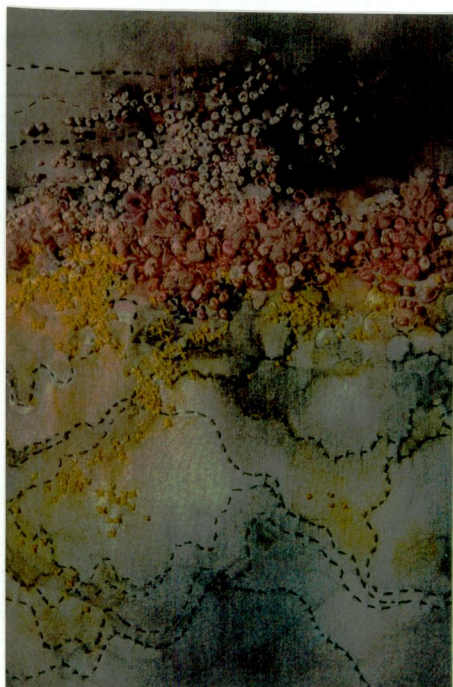
Embroiderer's from times past took their designs where they could find them - from paintings to knitting patterns, In the French atelier of the 1700's, the patterns were drawn out by a trained designer who was responsible for transferring the design to the cloth. Only then was it given to the embroiderers. After the chosen design had been drawn out, the material was stretched in a frame and the design pricked and pounced. It was then drawn in, using pen of turkey or crowquill. The embroiderer's, who had to provide their own needles, sissors and timbles, were then allowed to start.

The manner in which I have studied embroidery at third level has its roots in this heritage. It is, perhaps, in the last 20 years or so that the embroidery designer idea has come to fruitition. Students are chosen to study for their drawing and visual skills alongside any skills with the needle, in their application to study. I beleive that the sill of drawing and the needle run hand in hand. Because of the manner by which I have been thought, it is an automatic procedure.

The techniques that I have concentrated on in my final years work has been machine embroidery and hand-dyed threads and fabrics. Using hand-dyed materials has a long tradition in the textile crafts, dating back to pre-historic times and, i beleive, gives a highly personel imput into the finished piece. Machine embroidery on the other hand is a modern development. it was not until







15 EMBROIDERIES by Jan Beaney



1900 that it really took hold. The Swiss developed multi-needle machines capable of covering whole widths of fabric which looked like hand embroidery. Today, machine embroidery has increased in significance as a technique in its own right and is not generally used to imitate hand work.

Contemporary work amalgamates using the hand and machine. One embroiderer who has influenced me a great deal in my studies has been Jan Beaney. Her particular interest is developing surface qualities and the potential to create original designs in fabric and thread. Studying her work, I found techniques and ideas, which acted as a spring board for my own ideas. Her description of shadow quilting links with the build-up of layers in my sun-panel and her wide range of work with stitchery has given me ideas for the foreground of my panel.

Embroidery has progressed in both technical visual terms through the centuries. Today, embroiderer's are free to develop their own personal visual language. Students are encouraged to expand their own handwriting in thread and fabric as opposed to the worker's of Frances' 16th century ateliers. Sources of inspiration come from a wide range of visual stimuli and are transferred to cloth in a highly personalised manner. Influences and techniques from times passed are united with new working methods and adapted to our modern environment. one could say that today's embroiderers definitely can reap the

benefit of these developments and use them to create a  
new dimension in textile art.

The Educational Relevance:

"Works in the arts develop the ability to care, to care not about the monumental but about the little things, the inner aspects of experience - the shimmer of a droplet on a goldin leaf, the cool grayness of an early winter morning."

(Esner) (6)

"Art is life intensely experienced. For those with eyes to see, an encounter with a work of art can be deeply moving. From the sensual pleasures of using a handcrafted bowl to the transcendent awe of standing within a Gothic cathedral, art touches us on many levels." (16)

We are all guilty of looking without seeing. In our modern world we are constantly on the move, meeting deadlines or focusing on the task ahead. A child on his way to school encounters a range of interesting and exciting things that could provide sources of usual stimuli, but as familiarity breeds contempt, they more than often go unnoticed. Many schoolchildren perceive 'art' as something that happens in the artroom and its only extension beyond this maybe scenes taking place in stuffy museums and galleries.

My embroidery project increased my ability to examine an area at many different levels. I based my project on Saint Stephen's Green, both the park and architectural features. I used the same source for the school project because I could say it was both "familiar" and "unfamiliar" to the pupils. I felt this would constitute a challenge to my own beliefs about the value of increasing awareness of an everyday environment as a crucial source for visual education.

However my own artistic training has taught me to look and see. I was lucky to have an art teacher at post-primary level who instilled the idea that 'art' was about

the books I read, the clothes I wear, the environment paralleled to the 'fine art' area. In short I learnt that my environment is essentially visual and, through my visual experience I learnt and in the world round me.

"Art is not purely a lofty philosophical concept, but a concept which is part of the world around us."

(Eisner) (6)

Visual arts education encourages us to look, to see and hence to know.

"The prime value of the arts in education lies, from my point of view, in the unique contributions it makes to the individuals experience with and understanding the world. The visual arts deal with an aspect of human consciousness that no other field touches on: the aesthetic contemplation of visual form."

(Eisner) (6)

As a teacher, I would see one of the main aspects of my roll as that of a catalyst enabling my pupils to visually understand the world around them and through this to achieve a more rounder educational experience.

"The interdependence of art, craft and design is vital thinking at primary and post-primary levels and any attempts to separate them would reduce the value of the total educational experience. (12)

The Curriculum and Examinations Board Discussion Paper "The Arts in Education" points out the importance of this concept in the school curriculum. Personal identity and individual vision can be renewed by building sensory, artistic and cultural awareness in the student. In the classroom arts and crafts experiences can emphasize personal and aesthetic expression and development for all pupils irrespective of their level of ability. Art allows the pupil to invent, construct and express ideas not possible in any other classroom situation. Art develops an understanding of both visual and tactile forms. Crafts develop manipulative skills - painting and drawing - develop spatial awareness. Whatever the chosen media, the pupil can transform it into a personal product through skill, imagination, creativity and planning.

"Visual arts education is an active process through which the student learns to see and to think visually.

(12)

The art class offers the opportunity to use a more 'sensory' approach. It offers a chance for a combination of aural, tactile and visual experience. By adopting a sensory approach, one which values the holistic approach to learning and development rather than the end product, we can become aware of the "journey".





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The craft develops  
manipulative skills  
personal  
choices/ideas

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16 PUPIL AT WORK ON EMBROIDERY

"The work of visual art is a form to be explore ....  
Aesthetic experience is a process emerging out of the act  
itself. Unlike so many other types oif human activities the  
experience that constitutes art does not begin when the  
inquiry is over - it is not something at the end of the  
journey, it is part of the journey itself."

(Eisner) (6)

And becoming aware of our environment relating it to our  
own work is a skill and a sensitivity that once awakened,  
will always stay with us. Using the art class to open  
our senses to the world around us involves recognising.

"the newness that was in every stale thing .... the spirit-  
shocking wonder in a black-starling Ulster hill"

(8)

It involves learning to see the fine details of a flower,  
the texture on a tree stump, the bright colours on an  
advertising billboard. A closely observed drawing of a  
flower shows the artists knowledge of the stucture, form  
and colour of the plant sewing a textured embroidery  
based on a tree stump involves the artists tactile  
awareness, studying the billboard design gives the artist  
insight into visual communication and how it can be  
utilised in a street-setting. Giving a pupil a chance to  
get involved in painting, drawing and three-dimensional  
work opens the doors to educational development. It will

"help pupils to know themselves and world in visual terms through a structured integration of the dynamic between percieving, thinking, feeling and expressing."

(12)

There is an innate tendency to create or to make art in the young child. I t is, primarily, a means of expression through art the yound child perceives his environment. Every school, at every level, should encourage the student to foster his own sense of visual criticism.

"Experience in the arts also tends to encourage us to see the inter-relationship of things. Experience in art, either in it's production or its appreciation, demands attention to the relatedness of elements within a whole ... The arts provide an opportunity to initate, follow through, and conclude what they begin."

(Eisner) (6)

The art experience involves more than just making art. It also involves giving and receiving. The amalgamation of art, making and appreciation, provides a basis for self-development at a contrasting level to other more academic subjects on the school timetable. Art involves a thought pattern which does not depend on defined solutions but it does demand though and intellectual activity as well as creative and artistic energy. It offers the opportunity for a questioning approach.

"Factual learning and retention, unless exercised by a free and flexible mind, until not benefit the individual. Education has often neglected those attributes of growth that are responsible for the development of the individuals sensibilities." (Lownfeld and Brittain) (10)

Having a rounded educational experience services only to enhance all aspects of the learning process.

It may seem all very well to say a pupils sensory perception can be developed through the visual arts and through developing an awareness of the environment. The first step to this end. Here is where the importance of the art teacher comes to the fore. It is not enough to say today we will make rubbings to find texture and therefore we will become aware of tactile qualities. Confronted with abstract concepts or projects which seem to have no meaning will leave the pupil confused and frustrated. What the teacher must do is tap into the lives of the pupil, find out what interests and energy can be utilised as a bridge between these abstract concepts and the pupils' individual understanding

"Daily living offers us many visual experiences, trends and choices to bring to the students attention. They are thereby able to learn that the selection, arrangement and display of ordinary objects is very much related to the selection, arrangement and display of works of art." (15)

What is experienced in the art class has a lot to do with the world outside the school. The art class opens avenues which can relate to life outside the school in a dynamic way ... Why not design a set of shop-fronts for the centre of town, or a wall-hanging for the local church?

"The sources of artistic action emanate not only from the dream and the vision, nor from the desire to move the senses, nor from the effort to capture the moment and make it magical; artists are also moved by the social character of the society and the world in which they live."

(Eisner) (6)

It is in the teachers' interest to place himself in the sub-cultures of the pupil to try to identify with their situation, and help them use their experiences as a source in the artroom. Art can become the mirror of the pupils' personal observation of everyday life.

"The task is to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday doings and sufferings that are universally recognised to constitute experience.

(Dewey) (5)

The visual experience is derived from real experience. Hence, the teacher's experience plays a part in this

translation. The visual concepts of line, tone, colour, shape, form, texture and pattern have been long established as the rudiments of a language for visual analysis by art educationalists. But instead of concentrating on these concepts for their own sake, I feel, it is important to relate them to the pupils' direct experience. Thus the source material for any teaching-learning situation becomes crucial. It must excite and stimulate. From my own teaching practice experience I have encountered the difficulties of an uninterested class. Because of my concern to teach a concept and because I saw the source as secondary, the levels of interest declined and hence the learning experience diminished. A well-planned and well-preserved class offers both teacher and pupil alike, the chance for active learning to take place.

"It is not enough to pay lip service to the doctrine of visual aids; not enough to turn on the movie projector ... to provide a few minutes of entertainment in the dark."  
(Arnheim) (1)

The definition of a teacher is "one who imparts knowledge, skills..." (Oxford English Dictionary) and by this definition a sharing of the teachers' own experiences, observations and skills serves to enrich the pupils' potential for growth. To communicate the teachers' original artistic interests with the class serves as a starting point for pupils to form their own ideas. As I

have already said, art is not about pre-set answer and therefore the teacher should always be sympathetic to pupils ideas and artistic stimuli. Because the teacher loves ceramics does not and should not mean that the pupil will never have a textile or graphic experience. It is up to the teacher to provide an environment rich in visual stimuli. This encompasses all the visual arts, wheter they be found museums or at the back of the school yard. The aim should be to encourage the student to think in a visual manner.

"Thinking calls for images and images contain thought. therefore, the visual arts are a homeground of usual thinking."

(Arnheim) (1)

Ultimatly pupils are responsible for how they use their experiences. The teacher can teach a skill or share his/her inspiration and findings but cannot make decisions. "This, under guidance is what pupils need to learn on their own."

If a pupil becomes aware of his surroundings, he will recognise hae has a part to play in his own education.

"the individual can be free to reject of accept, to formulate opinions and to evolve new directions, but should not be free to be a passive bystander in our society."

(Lowenfeld Brittian) (10)



In the classroom, pupils made decisions in relation to how they would use their drawing reserved link to a design for an embroidery. Did they want to represent their drawing completely or perhaps just use a section and work with that. The visual arts provide an opportunity to explore the environment and a visual language to express it. The skills acquired in the art class are tools for another type of learning, another way of solving problems, which serve only to compliment all other aspects of learning and give the pupil an opportunity to experience a holistic education.

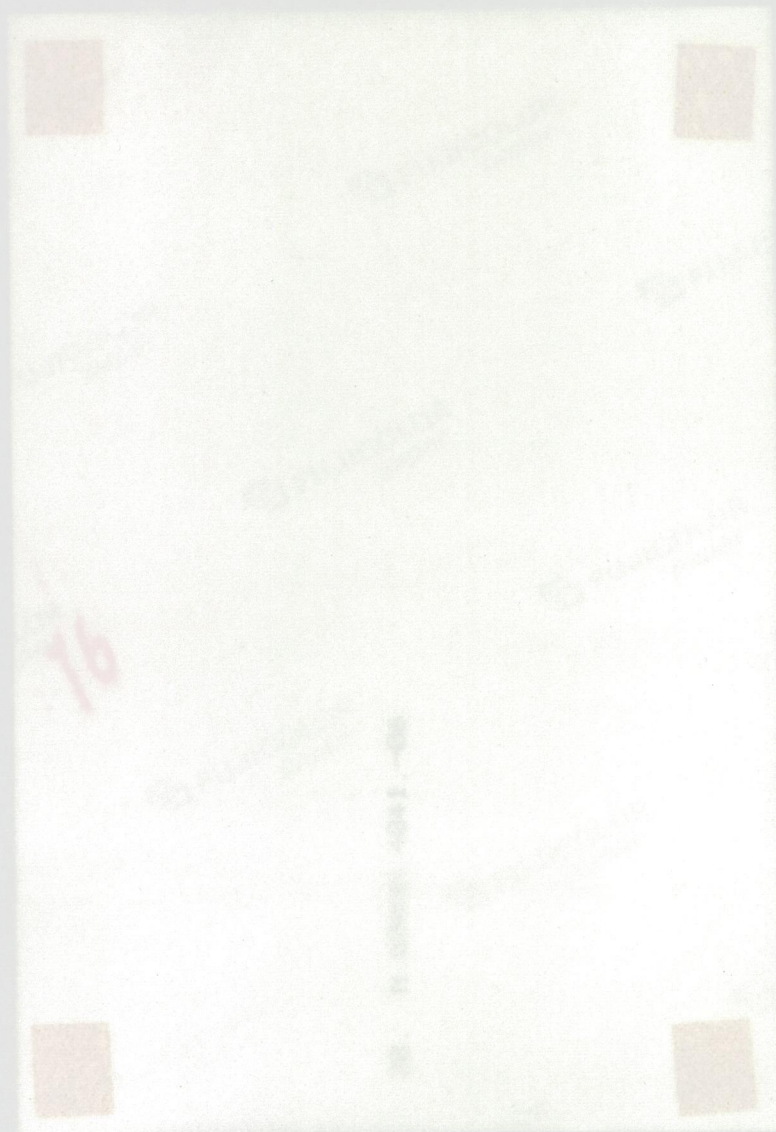
The final pieces, made by the pupils, sum up my approach to teaching. Although the source was a group experience of an area, (one they pass every day) the focus of each individual piece of research reflected personal preferences and discussions. Yet when all the pieces are seen together they become both an individual and group statement.

"It (art) is one of the rewards we earn for thinking by what we see."

(Arnheim) (1)

THE CLASSROOM PROJECT

"We can't tell them what to look at or what to look for. This, under guidance, is what students need to learn on their own." (15)



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17 PUPIL'S SKETCHING IN THE 'GREEN'

My classroom project was under-taken with a first year group from Loreto College, Saint Stephen's Green. My major project, as I have described, is an embroidered panel based on the architecture and natural environment around the Green. I wanted the pupils to share a experience paralled to my own. I decided that the pupils could follow a similar path to my own exploratory drawing research, working up a design and following on with an embroidery.

As a preparation for this project, I had in the first term, introduced drawing and technical skills which would helpo the pupils communicate what they saw in the 'Green'. We had examined colour and colour-mixing. This linked with their colour studies in the Greens. Also we explored drawing through line and shape. Line encouraged the pupils to look harder. Lines needed to link together to form an image - concentration was required. Shape told the pupils how different objects seemed to join together. how many shapes are contained within a lamp-post? How do they get together? Are they all the same size?

The pupils began their research in the same manner as myself. Wrapping up warmly against the January weather, the class began their drawing research in the Green. The directives I gave them on the first day were wide, in the sense that they could choose their own area to draw (within a limited area for supervisory reasons).



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Through the medium of line, they were to explore the environment concentrating on looking closely and paying attention to detail on the two following days drawing, the pupils explored the area they had chosen through shape and colour. Even though I had limited the pupils to what means they could express what they saw, I had given them freedom in their source material. I knew from my own experience that I had been attracted to a range of visual elements around the Green but there were other areas which did appeal to me eg studying the people in the Green. once a pupil is disinterested in the source, the battle has already been lost. The pupils made their own discoveries, and went back to study areas that appealed to them to study in more depth. I found that as a group, they were very aware of details - from litter in a dustbin to the number of bricks on a wall. The precise line drawings of the group illustrate this point.

When the research days were over, we returned to the classroom to work on the design. The pupils all made a tracing of the drawing they most preferred. The idea was they could work on the tracing without changing their initial research. The questions I put to the class were much the same questions I had asked myself during the design process of my own work.

- (i) Do you wish to use all of the drawing?
- (ii) How do the foreground and background shapes relate to one another? Are they all the same size? Would







19 CLASS AT WORK ON EMBROIDERIES

- contrast help?
- (iii) Do you show any areas of detail? Should there be more contrast between simple and detailed areas?
  - (v) What about colour? Do you need more of a contrast between dark and light areas?

The pupils worked with these ideas to finalise their design. They previously had worked with viewfinders which helped them to be more selective. Some of the pupils enlarged sections of their drawings using a grid for their design. Once we were satisfied with the design they were ready to start into their embroidery. All the designs were approximately A4 in size and myself, Sr Anne Mary ( the resident art teacher) and some helpful parents organised making embroidery frames to suit the purpose.

I demonstrated stretching the frame with calico (a stiff background fabric). When the pupils had this done, a background fabric was sewn in place which coincided with the background of their design. The designs were then transferred to fabric by tracing them onto tissue. The tissue served as a pattern. The pupils tacked through the tissue drawing, following the lines accurately. The tissue was then torn away to reveal the tacked design.

Applique was the basic method demonstrated for covering large areas of the work. The pupils used paper patterns for the shapes in their designs. They strengthened the





20 WORKING TOWARDS FINISHED PIECE



material with velene to prevent fraying and sieved the sewed the shapes in place. The basic shapes of the design were worked in stitchery. I gave the pupils a hand out on a range of basic stitches and showed them examples of how these shapes could be manipulated by changing the size and position of the stitches. As the work progressed differed pupils wanted to express different ideas. More techniques were introduced to fulfil these needs.

There was a continous evasluation throughout the work

- (i) Are all the areas being treated in the dame way?
- (ii) Do you need more contrast?
- (iii) Are there any areas which are too dark/ too light and 'jump' out of the work?
- (v) Do you need to use more stitchery?

The class became very involved and enthused with the work. As it progressed, they came up with more and more of their own ideas for things to do. I became the technical adviser! All that remains at this stage is to stretch - mount all the finished pieces. When this is done, they will all be joined together to create 1A's impression of Saint Stephen's Green.

I found the project very rewarding. I have watched as the pupils followed the same process as myself. It is interesing to see how other individuals percieve the samw





21 COMPLETED WORK



environment. Due to my own research and experience in the Green, I was aware of what the pupils were encountering. I could share my own findings and technical skills with them and hence they made discoveries of their own.

"We not only want to share with the class our own discovery, but by examining related possibilities, to show students how they can extend these possibilities and make their own finds." (15)

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CONCLUSION

The projects I had undertaken this year, both in my personal work and that of the classroom, have thought me a great deal. My personal project has given me confidence in my own ability. I have discovered that by immersing myself in a source I could achieve a great deal. Once I opened my eyes to familiar environment, there was a lot to see. Also by having a concrete visual reference book in my drawing research, I had solid foundation to work from as I worked on my embroidery.

What I learned through my own experiences came through I feel in the class room. I had confidence in what I was doing myself and therefore was able to communicate this to my pupils. As their project ran parallel to my own, I could share my own discoveries and interests with them. The pupils were working through a direct experience. They had made their own research, made designs, stretched embroidery frames, selected threads and fabrics. It was a series of personal choices guided and enhanced by my own experience.

I see teaching as a very active experience. It is not merely a matter of teaching technical skills (which are important) but also a matter of communicating my own involvement with the arts. It is important to introduce a learning environment which challenges, interests and stimulates the pupil. From this environment personal discoveries are made and developed. My aim would be to share my visual experience to foster not only a love of

the visual arts but also help pupils percieve, think,  
feel and express ideas in a visual way.

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